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Subject:	Antenna Permitting Bill Sparks Clash Between State, Local Officials
Date:	Thursday, April 13, 2017 1:59:36 PM

Peninsula Division Members and Colleagues:

Antenna permitting bill sparks clash between state, local officials

San Francisco Chronicle
April 12, 2017
By Dominic Fracassa

A resolution unanimously approved by San Francisco's Board of Supervisors on Tuesday may put the city on a collision course with Sacramento legislators over a bill that aims to shift the power to regulate the placement of wireless communications devices from local municipalities to the state.

The resolution, introduced by Supervisor Mark Farrell, marks the city's formal and forceful opposition to SB649, a bill introduced by state Sen. Ben Hueso, D-San Diego. Should the bill pass in its current form, Farrell said, San Francisco would also lose out on "tens of millions of dollars" in fees for permitting or leasing the areas where small-cell infrastructure would be placed.

The bill passed out of the Senate Energy, Utilities and Communications Committee on April 4. It would **give the state the ultimate authority to issue permits for devices known as small cells — compact antennas that can be placed atop telephone poles or lampposts to boost cell phone signals in densely populated areas**. Some look like slim cylinders; others look like boxes.

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Obtaining city-by-city permits needed to install small-cell antennas is a cumbersome process that hampers the ability to deploy the most cutting-edge technology for customers, advocates for the telecommunications industry say. Having a blanketing **"statewide framework" for approving small-cell projects, as Hueso's bill proposes, would streamline that process.**

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Some local governments, however, have blanched at the prospect of ceding their regional authority to authorize and regulate the antenna installations to officials in state capitals.

The issue has transformed seemingly mundane legislation about antenna permitting into a sharp-elbowed struggle pitting local and state governments against each other.

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San Francisco and 23 other California cities and towns have expressed opposition to SB649, including Dublin, Hayward, Lodi and Santa Clara. They've been joined by local governmental advocacy organizations such as the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties.

In general, critics of the bill say that it fails to take into account local concerns about design,

potential impact on historical structures and the structural integrity of the poles on which the antennas would be placed, among other concerns.

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Pressure from individual municipalities may be mounting, but should the bill make it through the California Legislature, Farrell said San Francisco would "explore all options as a city" when it comes to fighting its implementation.

"We're not going to stand idly by and give tens of millions of dollars in corporate breaks to telecom companies without a fight," he said.

To read the article in its entirety, click here.

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